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STAFF NOTES:

**Middle East
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South Asia**

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

Lebanon: Syrian Role	1
Zaire: "Plotters" Arrested	3
Malagasy Republic: Another Leader	4

June 17, 1975

SECRET

~~SECRET~~Lebanon*Syrian Role*

1 Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam arrived in Beirut on June 16 to join the prolonged consultations on the formation of a Lebanese cabinet. During a visit to Beirut three weeks ago, Khaddam played a central role in negotiating the resignation of the military cabinet and the appointment of Rashid Karami as prime minister.

3 Khaddam's initiative probably reflects Damascus' apprehension that support for Karami in Lebanon may be eroding and that he may be forced to abandon his efforts to assemble a government. Syria is widely known to have pressed President Franjiah to appoint Karami, and would be embarrassed to see him fail.

1 Khaddam presumably is urging Franjiah to elicit concessions from the right-wing Phalangists, who are still insisting that they be included in the new cabinet. In return, he may be assuring Franjiah that Syria is attempting to rein in Lebanese socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt, who traveled to Damascus for consultations yesterday.

2 If Karami gives up, Franjiah probably would feel justified in turning again to a weak Muslim politician whom he could more easily dominate. Syria's interests would not be served by the appointment of such a prime minister, or by the renewed fighting that probably would accompany Karami's resignation.

(Continued)

June 17, 1975

1

SECRET

SECRET

The continuing political and civil unrest apparently is proving a considerable strain for President Franjiyah, who underwent surgery the day before the recent round of troubles began in mid-April.

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June 17, 1975

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A number of middle and high-grade Zairian military officers have been arrested on charges of plotting a coup against President Mobutu; rumors are circulating in Kinshasa that the US was involved. According to one account, the coup was to have been staged on June 8, but the plot failed when a junior officer reported it to a Zairian official.

We do not know who is behind the anti-US rumors or the scurrilous stories on the subject which have appeared in the controlled press. Mobutu has been trying to erase the pro-US reputation that he has in much of Africa; thus, short-lived anti-US outbursts on his part are not uncommon.

In the present instance, he may be overreacting because of anxiety over the deteriorating security situation in neighboring Angola and his lack of success in influencing the US to play a more active role there. He has also been preoccupied with an unsuccessful search for large amounts of badly needed foreign financial assistance.

The alleged plot is the first to be reported from Kinshasa for some time. During the past three years, Mobutu on several occasions has reorganized the army's senior staff to keep its members dependent on him, and he has tried to draw the army more actively into social and economic development efforts to give it something to do. His efforts had appeared successful, but shortages of consumer goods have produced considerable grumbling within the military. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/NO DISSEM ABROAD/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

25X1A

June 17, 1975

3

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SECRET

Malagasy Republic*Another Leader*

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3 The military directory that has been ruling ineffectively in Tananarive since February turned over power this week to naval Commander Didier Ratsiraka, the leader of the cumbersome junta's leftist faction. It was the third change of leadership this year in Madagascar, which has been troubled by a resurgence of ethnic friction between the majority coastal tribesmen and the more prosperous Merina people of the central plateau.

2,3
1,3 Ratsiraka's peaceful accession as head of state and government on June 15 concluded a quiet struggle for influence with General Gilles Andriamahazo, a political moderate and the president of the 18-member directory that was formed following the assassination of head of state Richard Ratsimandrava. Coincident with the investiture of the 39-year-old Ratsiraka as head of a new Supreme Revolutionary Council, the directory dissolved itself and General Andriamahazo stepped down to a minor post.

3 Ratsiraka was the chief architect of the militant nonaligned policy adopted by the Indian Ocean island country three years ago following the ouster by the military of the pro-French civilian regime of former president Tsiranana. As foreign minister from 1972 until early 1975, Ratsiraka weakened drastically Madagascar's strong ties with France, cut its controversial links with South Africa, and established relations with communist countries. He was also primarily responsible for the policy, adopted in 1973, of barring all foreign warships from the country's ports.

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4 In domestic affairs, Ratsiraka favors socialist policies. In his first major policy statement since taking office, he decreed the nationalization of all banks and insurance companies.

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June 17, 1975

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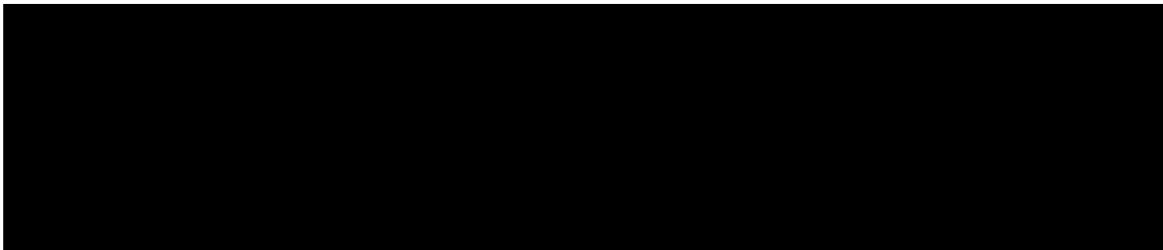
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3 | Ratsiraka is the first coastal tribesman to gain the top position since Tsiranana's fall and will probably receive wide support from that ethnic group, which had chafed under the leadership of three successive Merina military officers. The new head of state is surely aware, however, that his most urgent task is to lessen the ethnic tensions that have kept the country politically unsettled for months and underlay the murder of Ratsimandrava after only six days in office. The rivalry is particularly dangerous because it poses the possibility of clashes between the coastal-dominated gendarmerie and the Merina-dominated army.

In the past, Ratsiraka has appeared to have some ties to the Merina community, but they may view him less favorably now that he has replaced one of their own at the top. Many Merina probably believe Ratsiraka and other coastal members of the directory were behind the recent acquittal of all but three of a large number of coastal tribesmen accused of complicity in the assassination last February.

2 | The new Malagasy regime will probably increase the volume of radical rhetoric coming from Madagascar and matters of concern to the US will involve tough negotiations. For example, the new leader will almost certainly demand a large back-rent payment from the US as the price for extending the agreement that permits NASA to operate a tracking station on the island; the agreement formally expired at the end of 1973. 3 | Ratsiraka pressed for such a payment when he was foreign minister and again last March as a member of the directory. (CONFIDENTIAL NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

25X1A



June 17, 1975

5

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